Old World, New World, Third World Studios
Jürgen Brutoninger and Daniel Wyman
University of Natal, Department of Music
Durban, South Africa

ABSTRACT
The Gerald La Pierre Electro-Acoustic Music Studio has been a major center for electro-acoustic music since 1971. In recent years, the studio has embarked upon a pro-active course, designed to extend the availability and knowledge of music technology to many previously disenfranchised members of the creative community.

1. Old World- A Brief History of the Studio.
The Gerald La Pierre Electro-Acoustic Music Studio was the first of its kind to be established in South Africa. It was anticipated as part of the University of Natal, Durban, Music Department's structure when the Department was established in 1971. The Department Chairperson, Michael Brener, made preliminary inquiries in various types of equipment used for electronic music production at the time. This work, and the ensuing construction of the studio was continued by the next Department Chair, Christopher Ballantine, aided by Ulrich Suss, a German Composer then working as a Lecturer for the University of Natal. Professor Suss had been a student of electronic music pioneers Stockhausen, Berio, Ligeti, and Karkoshka, and was well acquainted with electronic music studios. The central synthesizer at the time was an ARP 2500 modular instrument.

From 1976 to 1981, the University studio was directed by American Gerald LaPierre (student of Brian Ferneyhough and Klaus Huber), after whom the studio was named. Professor LaPierre reorganized and developed the studio into a classic tape/synthesizer facility, until a tragic road accident took his life in 1981. The directorship of the studio fell to Kevin Volans, a South African composer, whose European studies included work with both Stockhausen and Kagel. During Professor Volans's directorship 1981-1985, the studio was moved to new premises, with purchases of an 8-track tape recorder and multi-channel mixing console added to the facilities.

From 1985 to the present, The LaPierre Studio has undergone a significant period of transition with the appointment of Jürgen Brutoninger as Director and Lecturer in Composition. Assessing the studio's potential in a multi-ethnic academic community, he designed plans to facilitate different modes of operation for the facility, including the development of a small acoustic recording studio added to the existing control-room. Small computer hardware and software were added, and MIDI facilities were integrated into the studio format. Curriculum development since 1988 has included coursework in analog, digital, as well as recording techniques.

Generally, the compositional use of the LaPierre Studio was indistinguishable from that of many other University facilities around the world. Compositions included electronic/concrete techniques with both tape and live performance formats. Several graduate and undergraduate composition students have submitted electro-acoustic works in fulfillment of degree requirements. Various research projects into chaos theory, fractals, spatial composition, as well as studies of the popular South African music industry have been undertaken by both staff and students. Post production editing and preparation of
tapes recorded by resident ethnomusicologist Veit Erllmann resulted in the release of *Movable Roots: Zulu Choral Music from South Africa 1950-1960* on a Rounder record label. This recording received a 1988 Grammy Award nomination.

Since 1990, a one-year course in Electro-Acoustic Music has been offered to qualified University students, the first accredited program at a tertiary educational institution in South Africa. Coursework includes audio recording, music production, synthesis/sampling, composition (training in score processing), as well as some computer-aided-instruction in music education. Coursework for a Master’s degree in Music Technology is in the planning stage, to commence in 1993.

The LaPierre studio serves both the department and the community as a resource of knowledge for local computer and music merchants, pop and jazz musicians.

3. Third World Perception: Our Responsibility as a University Studio in a Changing South Africa

Over the past several years, various recording projects serving Natal University’s wider community have been initiated and completed. Examples of these are, Art Gecko Jazz Counterculture: Mawubuye umhlaba wethu, Masimbi Strikers, Mandela Peace Rally, Music for Liberation: Chesterville Youth Group, Peace Music Share: COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) Culture Group Pinetown, Songs from Bamthwa’s Children: Sarmcol Workers’ Co-operative, Iziborgi Praise poets (in progress), and others. A close working relationship exists between the studio and cultural workers and groups, especially those from the progressive labour movement. One primary motivation behind these projects is the preservation and documentation of an important part of the South African struggle preserved and represented through its aural arts, which is not being touched by the commercial media (e.g., music previously banned by the white apartheid regime). A second desire has been voiced to help black communities rediscover their cultural heritage, and to make these recordings available to a much wider audience, including academic researchers.

From these recording projects and from our belief that South African academics must actively contribute to the end of racial and economic oppression, the LaPierre studio has responded to the need for educating cultural workers in the creative use of the production facilities themselves. Thus in 1990, a culture course which includes music and music technology/production has been established jointly by COSATU and the University of Natal’s Culture and Working Life Project. This is a two year certified course in cultural administration and creative work which, every weekend, draws workers from all over Natal. The University’s Media Resource Centre in connection with the LaPierre studio, has devised a more specialized course in audio production designed to help those who wish to acquire a general know-how of cultural production and its technology, from executive tasks of the music industry, to shop-floor duties of recording, mixing, etc. The LaPierre Studio’s collaboration with this Durban Media Trainers Group envisages, within the context of a new broadcasting dispensation, training for future community producers and journalists. These efforts are intended to turn “disempowered” cultural consumers into “cultural producers” who have as much control as possible over their final products.

4. Toward a New Musical Culture in a New South Africa

A number of experimental creative projects conducted by the LaPierre studio have brought together musicians from very different cultural backgrounds (African, Indian, European, United States). The purpose of these projects is to reach musical consensus through
improvisations which ultimately become polished compositions utilizing artistic values and disciplines from varied cultures. These improvisations take the form of interactive studio production, as well as live performance.

Examples of instrumentation include combinations of neo-traditional trade union praise poets of black African heritage, Indian flute and tabla players, African-American jazz performers, African Maskanda (ughubu bow and/or guitar) players, computer-driven samplers and synthesizers, as well as digital multi-channel assembly. These on-going creative productions, containing cultural elements with which all participants can identify are forming the foundation of future research and perception into the value of arts technology in developing multi-cultural societies. The uses of the Gerald LaPierre Studio are serving as a platform for future acculturation.

5. Old Third World: Inherited Problems

Problems of cultural and economic apartheid, international cultural and economic boycott as well as government’s squeeze on universities have created an uncertain future for research and creative projects dependent upon costly hardware. Much existing equipment was acquired as early as 1974, old in contemporary technological terms. It becomes increasingly expensive and difficult to maintain these pieces of equipment. At the same time we have more formal and informal students than ever. Their daily problems of transportation, as well as the high cost of education itself, slows down the progress of placing technology into the hands of a new generation of multi-cultural composers and artists. It is this new generation, searching for their own uses of technology within the context of traditional African Third-world culture, who will construct original contexts for the Gerald LaPierre Electronic Music Studio.